

Suggested Remarks
Paul W. Jones, Chargé d'Affaires
On the Occasion of the
Completion of the Congressional Internship
Program for Young Muslim Leaders
12 December 2005, 2:30 P.M.
2nd Floor, Yakal Room, Dusit Hotel, Makati City

**Distinguished guests (final list to be provided by the
GEM Program)**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today to celebrate the completion of the fourth round of internships for young Muslim leaders at the Philippine Congress.

The internship program provides qualified young professionals from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and neighboring areas in Mindanao with a rare opportunity to acquire

hands-on experience in legislation and policy formulation at the Philippine Congress.

The original idea for this program came from Speaker José de Venecia, who in 2002 sent to the US Embassy a description of his internship concept. We thought it would be an excellent project, and we endorsed the program for USAID support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the wonderful idea, and for your continued support of the program.

My warmest congratulations to the 21 young people comprising the fourth group of interns. It's great to see all of you again, after meeting you at the Iftar held at the U.S. Ambassador's residence in October. You are among the most talented of your generation, and

you carry with you today not just your own aspirations, but also those of the people of Mindanao. Indeed, you embody the spirit of young people in many countries who are committed to forging free, just, and democratic societies, which form the basis for lasting peace.

A foundation for peace has been established in Mindanao, but a lot of hard work still lies ahead. Stronger social and political institutions that will help to sustain and nurture the peace and ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic progress must be created. These strong institutions can emerge only through the efforts of committed and responsible citizens like yourselves.

In close cooperation with our Filipino partners, the United States Government continues to help promote sound economic development and strengthen peace in Mindanao. Our USAID programs in Mindanao support a wide range of development activities- including assisting former combatants to reintegrate into society, supporting anti-corruption efforts, better management of natural resources, increasing private sector investment to create jobs, providing electricity to remote communities using renewable energy, improving the quality of education, building roads, ports, bridges, and water supply systems, and improving delivery of health services.

But lasting progress will come only through your own creativity, your initiative, and your

sustained commitment. There are no shortcuts to building a prosperous and democratic society.

Success comes from people, whether public servants or private citizens, making the right choices, small and large, in the course of daily life, in whatever sphere they operate.

Over the past four months, you have had the benefit of intensive exposure to the inner workings of government. You have had the opportunity, given to few, to develop a better understanding of what democratic governance entails, at the national and local level, and to gain solid, practical skills that may assist you in whatever careers you choose. I hope, however, that whatever the future holds for you, that you remain committed to the vision of a

democratic and more pluralistic Philippine society.

I look forward to hearing about your success as future leaders in your respective communities.

I share the Speaker's hope that your experience in this program will help in serving the needs and fulfilling the aspirations of the people of the ARMM, Mindanao, and the Republic of the Philippines.

Thank you, and good day to you all.